

Don't be isolated

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Sermon Audio file

So this morning,
we're going to continue in our series in the book by Steph Liston on avoiding the hall of mirrors and I introduced the series several weeks back now that how when you look in the hall of mirrors, it just gives a distortion, a lie without we are not what we appear. To be. And we've got to I think it's like chapter seven. In the book, and the title of this chapter is called Isolate the Pry. And even Steph in his book says, "If all are through the chapters, this is probably the chapter that a lot of people were going to struggle with, the hardest one to grasp, to overcome. To look at." It's based around a verse in Proverbs 18, verse 1. We'll be looking at other passages as well because I've taken Steph's chapter as a basis, but I've told God, "Lead me to other parts of Scripture to fit in with this topic." So it's called Isolate the Pry. Proverbs 18, verse 1. This is from the ESV. I'll mention something in a minute. Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment. I'll read that again. Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire. He breaks out against all sound judgment. All the translations I looked at, all go from that point. Whoever isolates himself, decision-making, the NIV narrows it down a bit, which I don't want to pursue that way, but I'm not but I will read the NIV out. It says, "An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels." It sort of narrows it down, but I want to in. The whoever isolates himself, it's about decision-making. Whether it be decisions made for us or decisions that we make. So this whole subject of isolation is. Probably going to touch people. And I'm trying to be very sensitive this morning because I know that life can.

Treat us harshly,
but we have as we've been singing this morning,
we have a rock that we can stand on.
So isolation.
If you travel perhaps as a Congo,
the Central Republic of Congo at the moment,
and you come down with an illness and you travel back here,
you could probably end up in hospital in isolation.
You'd be in a ward all on your own.
Everybody would be in suits to why?
Because you probably come down with the Ebola virus.
And you're in isolation for the protection of others, so that others don't catch what you've got.
This verse talks about a personal isolation.
Isolation that we do by choice.
And it doesn't work the same way.
It does not bring protection.
It brings attack from the enemy.
All right?
It is we've spoken this morning Swapmelo mentioned about talking about the unity the body.
And I'm coming onto that later on in Ephesians 4.
So an isolation made by choice makes you vulnerable.
My son has been traveling over the last few years traveling to various countries with a lens the length of
a rocket launcher.
Photographing some beautiful pictures of big cats.
Big tigers, lions, leopards,
cheetahs. Beautiful creatures.
But it's a
Lesson that we learn.
The lion,
especially.
If you ever see a lion stalking a herd,
they were isolate a victim. Draw it away.
Force it away from the herd.
Whether it's because it's ill, old,
whatever.
So it becomes the focus and the lion will isolate that.
Victim.
So as I said,
I introduced this series back in week one.
We talked about a serpent in the garden.
So we know we have an enemy.
An enemy of God. And we are God's people.
So he's our enemy.
And he wants to disconnect us from other disciples.
The body of Christ.
He wants to disconnect us.
To stunt your growth spiritually.
And he's already mentioned about the group developing people,
growing people.
Satan doesn't want that to happen.
So he will isolate you from the body if you make decisions that bring that about.
We're warned in 1 Peter 5, verse 8,
"Be sober-minded.
Be watchful.

Your adversary, the devil,
prowls around like a roaring lion.
Seeking someone to devour."
Like.
The lion of natural world seeking to separate the victim.
That's what Satan's— His role is to do the likewise.
With us.
I hope you're hearing that this morning because that whatever we try to do for God,
he's trying to do the opposite.
But he won't succeed because he's been defeated by Christ on the cross.
So Satan has a plan.
That's why do we need to be aware of that?
Because God has a plan.
Determined me to Ephesians 4.
The problem with Proverbs sometimes is Swapmelo was sharing with me when we talked beforehand.
Proverbs can— they're like little sound bites,
and they contain— so you need to sort of develop what that's coming from.
So I just want to read Ephesians 4,
starting at verse 1.
I'll go through to 16 because it's— it gels together. It says,
"This is Paul speaking to your church in Ephesus." He says,
"I therefore prisoner for the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have
been called,
with all humility and gentleness, with patience,
bearing with one another in love,
eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
There is one body and one Spirit.
Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord,
one faith, one baptism,
one God,
and Father of all.
Who is over all and through all and in all,
but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
Therefore, it says,
when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.
In saying he ascended,
what does it mean?
But that he had also descended into the lower regions,
the earth.
He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens.
That he might fill all things.
And he gave the apostles, the prophets,
the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.
To equip the saints for the work of ministry.
For building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the
Son of God.
To mature manhood,
to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of
doctrine, by human cunning,
by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather,
speaking the truth in love,
we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ.

From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.
When each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."
So those last two parts there about the body,
every part of the body.
And if you— and as we read those verses,
we realize we're not just.
Sons and daughters of God,
but we're also brothers and sisters of other believers.
Each other when we're talking about the body, the unity of the body.
That's why Satan wants to isolate people so they don't grow, so they don't mature.
It is very difficult to.
Grow outside of the body.
Away from others.
I've been going through the book of Ephesians with a
Commentary by one of the old
Theologians.
I think he's dead now. But John Stott,
and he quoted on this passage.
He made a quote. He said,
"Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced in relation to God,
but in isolation from human beings." He says,
"You cannot be good in a vacuum.
But only in the real world of people."
And it's true that that word,
vacuum, that spoke to me.
I don't think any Star Trek fans here,
but in the opening sequences of this,
there's this space.
The final frontier. Well,
space is a vacuum.
But on the opening credits,
you get this spaceship with a whoosh sound.
I thought, hmm,
somehow you do not hear in a
Vacuum.
There is no sound in a vacuum.
And that, in a way,
describes the isolated person.
You not hearing anyone else but yourself.
You're reasoning.
You're logic.
So when you isolate yourself for whatever reason,
You're in dangerous ground.
So that lion that isolates the victim in the herd,
what does it lead to in the— I'll see.
I ain't know where a dead victim,
but not just in the victim, but in the herd.
Generates an element of fear.
And that is probably one of the main things about the whole thing about isolation.
There is a fear it.
Brings about fear.
It causes the reasoning— It brings fear.
It causes fear. And it happens because of our fear.

So sometimes isolation— If we go back to that verse in Proverbs, it says,
"Whoever isolates himself."

So it's a decision that has been made by the isolated individual.

It's— I understand, yes,
life causes isolation.

We'll touch on that a bit.

But when you make that conscious decision to withdraw— So sometimes that isolation can be a result of
us not dealing with the fear in our own. Our own lives.

Relationships are hard, aren't they?

The human race is difficult.

Relationships— but we're called into relationships.

So whether we like it or not,

that is Ephesians 4.

That is God's plan.

You cannot grow in isolation.

You are called to be part of his body. Together.

So fear has many forms in relationships.

One.

Of the things I noticed certainly in the working world when I was— when I was working.

If you view others in a competitive nature.

Your fear is that others will always be better than you.

You're always striving.

But when you get to a point where you feel that you are better than someone else,
you look at— you're looking down on them.

You then start to get into an attitude of fear of rejection.

This is the whole thing that drives a lot of relationships in this day and age.

Comparisons, fear of rejection,

and that fear can be the thing sometimes that drives us into isolation.

Because we can't cope.

So when we talk about fear, in the personal way,

what is— If I'm in a high place and I've got a fear of falling,

If I'm doing something— electricity,

fear of electric shock.

It's all about self-preservation, isn't it?

That's what fear does.

It brings a sense of self-preservation.

I don't want to do this because I could come to harm.

That's not God's way.

God wants us to bring us together in relationship together.

So that my fears are dealt with.

I can read through the Bible at home.

There are good times of isolation.

It's when I sit at home in isolation with no distractions reading through the Bible.

And there's a lot of wisdom.

There's a lot of guidance in there.

But the Bible in itself is not— you listen carefully on this.

Don't misquote me.

But the Bible itself can't tackle every issue in my life.

It doesn't tell me who I should marry.

It doesn't tell me where I should work.

It doesn't tell me where I should live.

But there is a general wisdom in the Bible that— and God draws us together as a family.

Because we share that wisdom.

I'm of older years,

so technically I'm supposed to be a man of wisdom.

Ask my wife whether that's true in certain things.

Yes.

It is true to a degree.

But that's why we are called together.

Because ask my life group members. We had quite a heated discussion one night.

Because we're learning.

I had to think,

right, does this make sense?

Am I reading?

And you'll be glad to know we're still a life group. So there you go.

That's what a fixed fear fixes on self-isolation.

Let's have a look at one character in the Bible who is a description of all. And.

Is cropped up before in these passages.

King Saul.

Israel's first king. Before his successor,

King David.

So when you compare— when you read through the beginning chapters of 1 Samuel,

when you compare Samuel and Saul,

and David, Saul.

Didn't really have— other than his son Jonathan,

who's loyal to him,

Saul had no real relationship with anyone.

He said he was chosen that he was handsome.

He was head and shoulders above everyone else.

Physically,

he was a good character.

David, on the other hand,

when you look through the passages— there's a whole list of people that David.

Priest Prophet,

the army commander,

all the men of action who wanted to align himself themselves to him.

And he listened to the wisdom that they bought.

But Saul didn't.

And in many ways,

it came from the requirement they wanted for a king.

You're reading 1 Samuel 8,

verses 4 to 6.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. And said to him,

"Behold,

you are old,

and your sons do not walk in your ways.

Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."

But the thing displeased Samuel,

when they said,

"Give us a king to judge us."

And Samuel prayed to the Lord.

Why did it displease Samuel?

Because God had been the leader.

Of the Israelites.

He was their judge.

He was their guiding light.

Everything was done through what the word that God brought through Samuel in prophet and others.

And.

A key point there says,
"Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."
Israel was never called to be a nation like the nations around them.
They were called to be a witness to the nations.
To show God in His glory and His guidance,
His direction. And that can be like us today.
Looking around,
we are not called to be like people out there.
We are called to share the God of glory with the people out there.
That's why it displeased Samuel,
because it wasn't that they wanted a king,
but they dismissed God.
And we know many people out there have dismissed God.
But we need to.
Share God with them.
So going back to Saul,
1.
Samuel 10,
we see Saul was anointed. It's interesting.
The word was prince.
Because God was the king.
Over the nation of Israel.
So he's anointed as prince over God's people.
And the amazing thing happened even.
Though I don't think it was God's original plan,
as he was anointed the Spirit of God fell on Saul.
It says he had a new heart.
He was a changed—he was a new man.
And he ended up prophesying with the prophets.
And you think,
"Oh, what a way to go.
Way to go."
But then we read that was when Samuel anointed him,
shared what God had laid on his heart. Said, "Right.
This is to be anointed king."
Later on in 1 Samuel 10,
21 to 22, and Saul, the son of Kish,
was taken by Lot.
They were using the Urim and Thummim stones on the ephod of the priests.
So that was how they were directed.
To make decisions.
So the Benjamites were chosen— Saul's father,
the family was chosen.
So it's coming down.
And then Saul, the son of Kish,
was taken by Lot.
But when they sought him,
he could not be found.
So they inquired again of the Lord.
Is there a man still to come?
And the Lord said,
"Behold,
he has hidden himself among the baggage."
I sat and I looked at her.

This is a man who's been anointed.
The Spirit had fallen on him. He was prophesying.
Yet at the—well, at the moment,
he was.
To be found. He was hiding in the baggage.
The word baggage means just sort of the clutter.
And sometimes— If you were going on holiday this year and you've got the—you've got the luxury of
flying on an airliner,
you'll have a restriction on size. And weight of the baggage that you can take.
But in life,
we seem to require baggage.
You can put that in inverted commas. Baggage. You know,
everything that seems to a sailor's clutter us up,
distract us, whatever.
And sometimes it's that baggage of life that causes to be eyesighted.
Trying to bring this to a conclusion. It says,
as I started off, it says,
"I know isolation can come in life for various reasons."
I want to pray later on for various situations. God's laid on my heart.
But bereavement.
Because marriage certainly is probably the deepest relationship humans can express to one another.
And bereavement is really a difficult time.
Difficult time.
And it can lead to isolation.
It's many other things in life that can cause us.
And it is a choice.
Initially,
sometimes the roar of heights can lead us into isolation.
But it's that bursting plover, says,
"Whoever isolates himself."
So it's a decision, isn't it?
There is a decision that we can make— To come back, seek help,
to come back. Not to be isolated.
So we can make choices.
Samuel was not happy until he prayed to God.
And that's always the first place that we should go.
Jesus said,
"Come unto me. Come unto me."
And that's the first—first place we should always go with whatever we're going through.
But.
We don't stop there. Because in coming to hear me,
he would direct us to others.
Those that have been through circumstances.
Those that have got the wisdom of experience to help—to help you.
But not—not to go off and hide in the baggage.
I found this—this whole subject very different. As I said, you know,
and it's probably touching on—so.
What do we do?
Because I find myself isolated at times.
I'm going to be honest here.
Because when we're hearing aids,
I don't hear clearly.
In a noisy environment,
I just—I—I shrink sometimes.

You'll often find me in a—in a corner with no noise coming from behind me.
And I have to—I.

Have to recognize the signs.

And that—that's—that is sound advice from any situation that we find ourselves.

Backing off.

Isolating ourselves.

We are—we need to ask ourselves, "Why?"

Because it's not a healthy environment to be on our own. Yes,
there are—there are times when nothing makes sense.

There are times when we feel like we're in a wilderness.

Sometimes those are the times that God is using—He wants to get you.

He wants to develop you. To grow you.

In the wilderness.

Jesus,

right at the start of his ministry,

went into the wilderness.

The Holy Spirit guided him into the wilderness.

But sometimes the things that were going for can drive us into the wilderness for the wrong reasons.

So then I just want to— Draw this to a—a close. I'm going to pray in a while.

But just— Right.

I just want us to do—close your eyes and just—I'm not going to get you to stand.

Just close—close your eyes and just—be open.

To what God wants to hide in your heart. First of all,

let's—let's— Let's go with the positive things.

Who is there in your life that.

You rely on? And they rely on you.

Who are those deep relationships that you have?

We know we have a relationship with God the Father.

But he's brought us into the body.

So who are those relationships that you have?

So the first thing I want us to do this morning—and I'll pray—is give thanks to God.

Give thanks to God for those who.

In your life.

And in giving thanks to God for those relationships,

it's determined to spend time enriching those relationships.

Because relationship is—is two-way, isn't it?

And secondly,

I want us to ask God this morning to bring fresh.

Relationships into your life.

Relationships that will encourage and develop you. And likewise,

that you will encourage and develop them.

Because this—this is what we're called to do.

We're not called to be isolationists.

Next,

I want us to pray.

Make a decision.

Because that bursting proverbs was talking about decision-making, isn't it?

So make a decision.

A fresh decision today.

To turn from all isolating tendencies.

And to be proactive relationally.

Sometimes.

We have to step out. We have to make the first step.

Nearly 42 years ago,

I had—I had to be brave. I had to make the first step.
Last.
Honesty thing,
I'd still be a single man.
I made—I had to approach a young woman that might—I had caught.
I had to be bright.
I had to take the first step.
And sometimes— Fear.
Wins.
But we need to overcome fear and take the first—first step.
Finally,
I was—I just want to pray for.
Healing.
I've—I've—as I was going through this,
I had a sense of the words never again came into my mind.
And I think there's people here this morning that you've been hurt by relationships.
You've trusted people.
You've ended up isolated because you've been let down.
And you've uttered those words never again. Well,
Father.
God,
we just ask now that your Spirit would just fall on those hearts. Those spirits, Lord,
that have uttered those words never again. Lord,
I just pray that you would just break off.
Because that is a curse,
Lord.
And I—we just thank you that you bring us into your body.
Into relationship. We're not one another.
That is your guiding plan, Lord. So,
Lord, I just pray that you will just bring restoration.
I know some of us here with different characters.
We're all individuals.
That passage in Ephesians talks about unity.
But the latter part, it says he gave gifts.
To mankind.
So there is a diversity.
That means that's not a negative thing. That's a positive thing.
There is a diversity in the body.
Look around this room now.
There's different nations—different people—different gifts.
So we need to be proactive relationships. We need—we need together.
So.
Lord,
I have—I just pray, Lord,
that there's—there are those that are naturally outgoing.
Lord,
there's—there's those that are naturally more reserved. But I just thank you, Lord,
that you've made us all different. But you've brought us together.
So I just—I just pray that you just help us to live.
In the unity of your—your body.
Lord.
I just pray that we're differences crop up.
It won't end up in isolation.
But it'll just end up in healing and forgiveness and grace.

Lord,
we just thank you— So,
Lord,
those are the—the—that are feeling isolated this morning. Lord,
I just—I just pray for your—your touch upon their lives,
Lord.
Your Spirit to commune with their spirits, Lord. Oh, Lord,
I just pray that you— Call them to speak out, Lord. To share with others.
So the isolation comes to an end, Lord.
And, Lord,
those that feel that they're isolated for the moment in a season, Lord,
I just pray that you would just develop them.
You would just grow them, Lord,
to—to—to move on in what you've got for them in the future.
But, Lord,
as in finally, I just ask, Lord,
that.
It says perfect love casts out fear. Your perfect love for us,
Lord, breaks.
The fear.
Causes fear to flee, Lord,
because we trust in you.
As we sang earlier,
you are the rock that we stand on. So, Lord,
I just thank you— This is a hard subject,
Lord.
But I just pray even now that your Spirit is just touching hearts. Touching lives, Lord.
That your word will become alive.
I just thank you, Lord.
I just thank you, Lord. Amen.
If you want individual prayer,
afterwards,
then come and—don't be isolated.
Come and we pray for.
You any else? No. I just kind of—yeah.
Okay.
So don't be isolation.
There's tea and coffee out there.
Socialise.
Talk to people.
Make a point of talking to someone.
You've not spoken to for a long time.
Or never—I know I'm guilty.
So yeah.
That's been helpful. Thank you, Lord. Anyway, right.
Carry on next week with this series.
In a few weeks' time,
I will be doing it again on mercy.
That goes—that goes hand in hand with isolation,
isn't it? So look forward to the—yeah. Thank you.

Application Questions

1) The sermon describes how Satan isolates believers to stunt spiritual growth. Can you think of a time

when you felt isolated—either circumstances or by choice? What were the consequences, and how did reconnecting with others help?

2) In Ephesians 4, Paul emphasizes unity in the body of Christ with diverse gifts. How does recognizing that you have unique gifts (and limitations) change the way you view your role in the church community?

3) King Saul was anointed by God's Spirit yet hid himself among the baggage when it was time to step into his calling. What 'baggage' (fears, shame, comparisons, past hurts) might be keeping you from fully engaging in relationships and community?

4) The sermon contrasts isolation with biblical meditation and prayer. How can we discern whether a season of solitude is healthy (spending time with God's Word) versus unhealthy isolation (withdrawing from others due to fear)?

5) If someone in your life has said 'never again' after being hurt in relationships, how could you—as part of God's body—help restore their faith in community? What risks might you need to take to welcome them back?